

# Canada and the Commonwealth

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# THE COMMONWEALTH

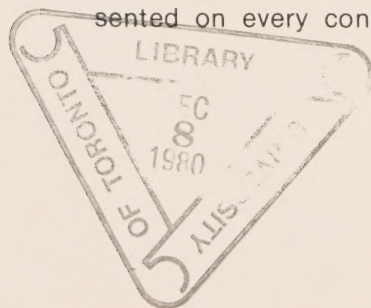


As the territories within the British Empire became self governing and independent, their tradition of shared values, common language of administration and similar public institutions convinced many national leaders of the value of maintaining some form of association to replace the passing imperial links. The modern Commonwealth, the Commonwealth of Nations to give its full title, a voluntary association of 44\* independent countries is the result. Both the continuing importance and the success of the Commonwealth are indicated by its constant growth. For instance, in 1978 the Commonwealth gained three new members, in 1979 another three and in the first half of 1980 another two.

The Commonwealth is represented on every continent. It

includes approximately one quarter of the world's countries and approximately one quarter of world population. It embraces a rich variety of races, languages, creeds, religions and cultures, and is a unique association in which national representatives meet in an atmosphere of informality and intimacy to exchange views on global and Commonwealth affairs and to determine what may usefully be done together. In a world characterized by divisive interests such as ideology, race, religion and level of economic development, the Commonwealth can transcend such interests and bring a world perspective to matters of concern to all members.

\*Total membership as of 1 August 1980









# Canada and the Commonwealth

At the 1971 Singapore Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the principles of the association were defined in the Commonwealth Declaration, which contains the following description: "The Commonwealth of Nations is a voluntary association of independent sovereign states, each responsible for its own policies, consulting and co-operating in the common interests of their peoples and in the promotion of international understanding and world peace". The Declaration also affirms the belief of Commonwealth members in the United Nations and its efforts to promote international peace and order; the liberty of the individual and each citizen's inalienable right to participate in creating his society; the evil nature of racial prejudice and discrimination, the principles of human dignity and equality, and the inequality of colonial domination; the need for the progressive removal of disparities in wealth between different sections of mankind; and the value of the Commonwealth as a means to promote international coopera-

tion. In pursuing these principles, the member countries of the Commonwealth believe they can provide a constructive example of the interdependent approach vital to peace and progress in the modern world.

Membership in the Commonwealth is an important aspect of Canadian foreign policy, and Canada has consistently supported its development as a vigorous and effective association working for international peace and progress. Canadian objectives have remained constant: to strengthen the association, to encourage members to participate more actively and to assist its development as a vehicle for practical co-operation.

## **A. Canada and the Commonwealth Association:**

Canada played a fundamental role in the emergence of the Commonwealth. It was Canadian insistence on achieving independent status within the British Empire that was the focus around which the future Commonwealth association developed. Canada was searching for a form of association that would allow the full independence befitting a mature and sovereign state, while retaining the traditional connection with the United Kingdom and its Empire.



With the Statute of Westminster in 1931, the British Empire evolved into the British Commonwealth and, after World War II, into the modern Commonwealth of Nations or more simply, the Commonwealth. As these changes evolved, member countries, whether monarchies like Malaysia or republics like India, agreed that the Queen should be the symbol and Head of the Commonwealth. Heads of Government reaffirmed this by the decision that their 1977 meeting, which normally would have rotated to some other capital, should be held in London when the Queen celebrated her Silver Jubilee. More recently, the Heads of Government held their 1979 meeting in Lusaka, Zambia, and the Queen, as Head of the Commonwealth, journeyed to Lusaka to meet the Heads of Government at their biennial conference.



The development of the Commonwealth has been in a direction complementary to Canadian interests and attitudes — it is a family association in which we can feel at home. The Commonwealth's frankness, its informality, its freedom from super-power hegemony, its concern with practical co-operation, its diversity, are all aspects that reflect the Canadian approach to international relations.

Canada attaches particular importance to the flexible, evolutionary nature of the Commonwealth. Its foundations do not rest on a formal constitution or a structure of rigid statutes, but rather are rooted in shared values, common traditions and unwritten understandings arising from its historical background. The heritage of shared beliefs provides a unity of purpose for

the Commonwealth which Heads of Government expressed at Singapore in 1971 in the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles, referred to simply as the Commonwealth Declaration. In this declaration, Commonwealth member countries displayed an impressive unanimity in their attitudes to fundamental questions of human freedom, world peace and security. They regarded these principles as valid not merely for themselves but as a contribution to the collective understanding and goodwill of all mankind.

Canada supported this outward-looking role of the Commonwealth. In the view of Canadian Arnold Smith, who served for ten years as the first Commonwealth Secretary-General:

“Our task is to use the Commonwealth construc-

tively as one of the available instruments of world politics, to help us all learn to share a planet. Helping humanity learn to share all the world has to offer, sensibly, justly, creatively, must become the overriding goal of responsible politics, and must become a habitual vision of all those who work in the macro-political field”.

In an era of political, economic and social conflicts that menace global harmony and even survival, the Commonwealth continues to prove that a relationship of understanding and co-operation between peoples of the world is possible when founded, as in the Commonwealth, on attitudes of equality, friendship and mutual self-respect.



## **B. Canada and Commonwealth Functional Co-operation:**

Sentiment and nostalgia for the past do not dominate the Commonwealth association. It is action-oriented, interested in providing tangible results for members and practical programs of concrete value. Since the initiation of the Colombo Plan in 1950, the Commonwealth has progressively expanded its concern for the economic and social development of its poorer members and its activity in their interest.

Commonwealth programs of practical assistance have helped a number of countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the South Pacific on their path towards independence. The Commonwealth sees development assistance not as a one-way street that sets the donor against the recipient, but as a continuing partnership in which all members contribute as they can to the improvement of their respective societies.

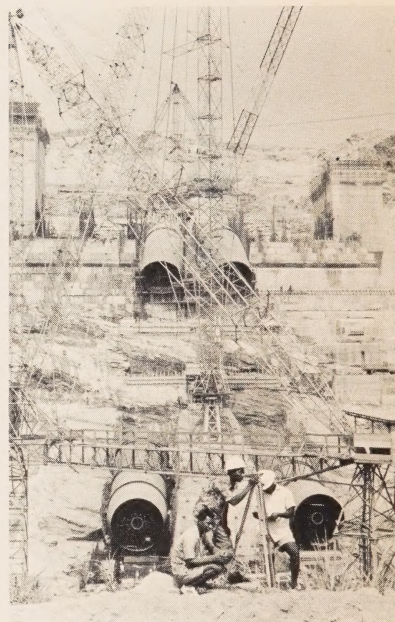




# Functional Co-operation – the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation

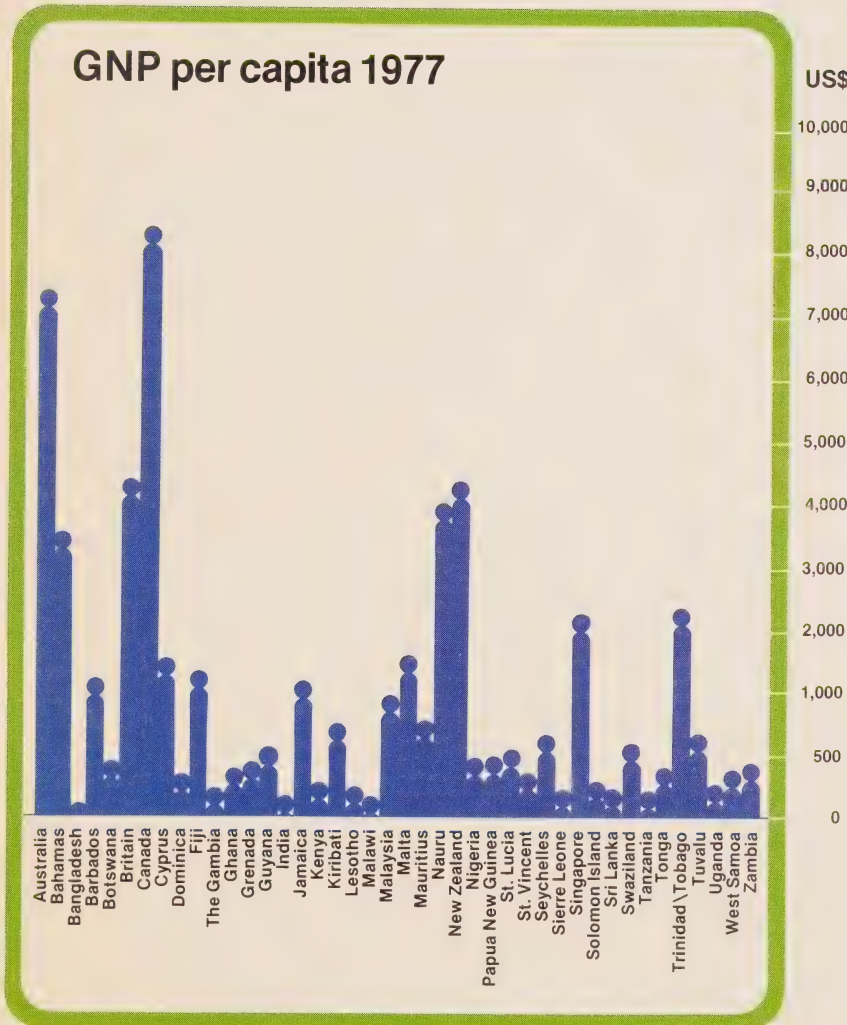
Canada supports the Commonwealth's pragmatic approach to functional co-operation and is among its most active contributors of funds, technology and trained individuals. For example, Canada gave the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC), the chief Commonwealth program of development assistance, \$6.5 million towards its 1977/78 fiscal year, \$7.8 million for 1978/79, \$8.8 million for 1979/80 and \$10 million in 1980/81.

These figures represent Canada's continuing and active commitment to Commonwealth co-operation and amount to over 40% of the CFTC's annual budget. The CFTC is multilateral and is supported by financial contributions from Commonwealth member countries and a number of the dependent territories. It draws upon human and technical resources from all parts of the Commonwealth to help meet the development requirements of its members. It has made a point of encouraging mutual self-help among developing members, with half the experts on assignment to developing countries coming from other third world countries. The CFTC has quickly established a reputation for speedy response, flexibility and quality. It has also ensured the accommodation of development requests from smaller nations unable to obtain attention and assistance from other major international agencies. It is, finally, an efficient development assistance mechanism whose minimum overhead costs ensure the most effective funding for its many programs.





## Youth and the Commonwealth



The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) is another important area of co-operation. It was established in 1973 after a meeting in Lusaka of Commonwealth Ministers concerned with youth matters. The program promotes pan-Commonwealth action in dealing with the practical problems faced by youth. Seminars and research in key areas such as unemployment, education, health, rural development and urban adjustment are going on all the time; and three regional youth-development centres engage in a variety of training programs for youth workers. The CYP also administers the Commonwealth Youth Service Awards which provide travel and cash awards to outstanding youth-organized projects in social and community development. One of the earliest winners was a community-action youth group from Victoria, British Columbia. Canada actively supports the CYP as another example of inter-Commonwealth co-operation in areas of concern to both developed and developing countries and has contributed approximately 30 percent of CYP funding since the program's inception.





Canadian Press, Commonwealth Secretariat, Oxfam

### **C. Canada and the Official Commonwealth:**

Canada places great value on the unique style and content of Commonwealth consultation. The most important Commonwealth forum is the biennial meeting of Heads of Government, where the atmosphere is informal and the agenda designed to encourage frank and personal discussion of world problems — political, economic and social — as well as to consider a selected range of Commonwealth functional programs of cooperation. These meetings have rightly been described as unique in their family atmosphere. There are no blocs, votes or vetoes and the objective is a better understanding of each other's point of view, including issues on which they may differ. Where differences persist, it is hoped that it will be on a basis of friendship and better mutual understanding. When a decision is reached on common policy for an important issue, it is achieved by consensus. There have been some notable successes, the latest being agreement at Lusaka on how the Commonwealth could assist in solving the Zimbabwe/

Rhodesia problem to the satisfaction of the world community and all parties concerned.

The Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, described as follows the Commonwealth consultation process:

"This is one forum where we can speak frankly and generate less rancour. We have the same backgrounds . . . use the same terms of reference. We inherited basic institutions and concepts of government in society. We understand each other better than any other group does. We use the same diction and concepts. It does not mean that we all stay put. We are all evolving and discovering our own personalities. We have all been brought up in similar institutions, with ideas and ideals which make it possible for us to speak with an informality and intimacy which is not possible elsewhere".





This same spirit and approach is evident at more specialized Commonwealth meetings. Economic matters are discussed annually at the Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meetings, held the week before the World Bank and International Monetary Fund meetings; they are discussed also in Commonwealth consultations at the GATT multilateral trade negotiations and at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. World economics is a concern to all Commonwealth members and a Commonwealth group of experts proposed practical measures directed at closing the gap between the rich and the poor countries; the group's report, "Towards a New International Economic Order," has been favorably received not only by member states but by broader international bodies such as the United Nations.

The range and frequency of Commonwealth meetings is considerable. For example, in the fields of science and research, there are biennial meetings of the Commonwealth Science Council, the Commonwealth Agricultural Bureaux, the Commonwealth Advisory







Aeronautical Research Council, the Commonwealth Metallurgical Conference and the Quinquennial Commonwealth Forestry Conference. In education and youth affairs, there are the triennial Commonwealth Education Conferences, regular meetings of the Commonwealth Education Liaison Committee, annual meetings of the Commonwealth Youth Affairs Council and regular meetings of the Commonwealth Youth Programme's Committee of Management.

Government consultations on health matters include the triennial Commonwealth Medical Conference and the annual Meeting of Commonwealth Health Ministers and Senior Administrators held before the World Health Assembly meetings in Geneva. Commonwealth Law Ministers meet every two years and there are biennial meetings of the Commonwealth Telecommunications Council. Other specialized conferences encompass the Commonwealth Auditors General Meeting, the Conference of Commonwealth Postal Administrators, the Commonwealth Defence Science Conference and the Commonwealth Conference of Heads of Valuation Departments.

Besides these regular government consultations, there are other meetings, seminars and workshops on specific topics of interest to Commonwealth member governments.

In addition to the activities already mentioned, Commonwealth governments consult each other on political matters. In the words of the present Commonwealth Secretary-General, Shridath Ramphal:

“It is here that the Commonwealth facility for an ongoing exchange of views at all relevant levels of decision-making — but, more specially, its special facility for frank consultation at the level of the political leadership — can be a catalyst in the process of consensus formation. The uniqueness of this special facility which Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings provide should never be overlooked or minimized. It is the world's only opportunity for frank and intimate exchange of views between political leaders of the world's people, representative of almost every single element in the spectrum of international opinions and positions. Not only can Commonwealth leaders influence each other in their periodic face-to-face meetings, but they can greatly extend their collective influence through the regional groupings and organizations in which they separately play roles of

great prominence. The Commonwealth is thus the very antithesis of a bloc; but, in a world of blocs, its role in building those bridges that are necessary to the emergence of a planetary community can be of immense value and significance."





## The “Spirit of Ottawa” – Informality as a Means Towards Progress

In 1973, Canada was host to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and, in preparation, emphasized the need for these meetings to remain frank and informal, avoiding rigid agenda and set speeches. The Ottawa meeting strongly supported this approach and endorsed the conference guidelines which became known as “the spirit of Ottawa”.

At the Ottawa meeting, the Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre Trudeau, said that perhaps the greatest strength of the Commonwealth is the opportunity for its leaders to sit down together as equals and discuss informally the problems affecting the millions they represent, and “... all the other advantages of the Commonwealth relationship — the exchange of people, the trade patterns, the economic assistance and co-operation schemes, the informality of diplomatic representation — these all assume their tone from the frank and free dealing at the Heads of Government Meetings”.



#### **D. Canada and the Unofficial Commonwealth:**

Extensive governmental and official relations are supplemented by the wide variety and number of Commonwealth contacts at the unofficial level. Well over 200 non-governmental bodies form the human element of the association and contribute much to the strengthening of Commonwealth ties. Of the many Commonwealth conferences, events and meetings in any given year, approximately 50 percent usually are sponsored by non-governmental organizations. Some of these are financed or partially funded by the Commonwealth Foundation.

To encourage the voluntary sector within the Commonwealth, a Heads of Government meeting created the Commonwealth Foundation in 1965. Its purpose is to promote interchanges between organizations in professional fields and to assist, when required, in the establishment of non-governmental institutions or associations where these have not previously existed. At the 1979 Lusaka meeting, Heads of

Government decided that, subject to a review, the Foundation's mandate might expand to include culture, information, social welfare and rural development while maintaining its interest in the professional organizations.

All members of the Commonwealth contribute to the Foundation's budget. Like those of the Commonwealth Youth Programme, the Foundation's operations are for the direct benefit of all member countries. Canada views the Foundation as filling an important need other institutions and programs do not cover. The Foundation has helped establish and often provides continuing support for numerous Commonwealth professional associations. These organizations represent architects, librarians, nurses, veterinarians, land surveyors and museum curators to name but a few. In fact, they cover the spectrum of human endeavour, from the promotion of press freedom to the study of Commonwealth literature.

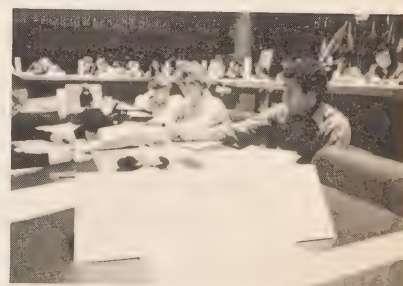
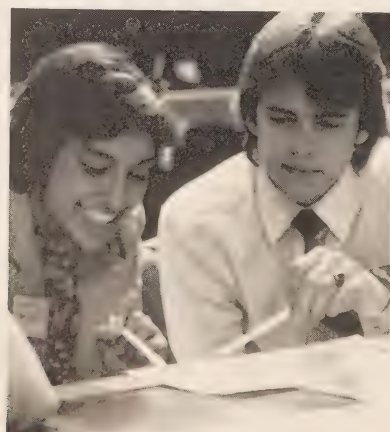
One of the most active associations is that of Commonwealth parliamentarians.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association brings together members of national and provincial or state legislatures from all parts of the Commonwealth for seminars and the annual Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference.

Another voluntary organization is the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS). The Society is active in many countries of the Commonwealth. In Canada, the National Council and the nine branches of the RCS arrange conferences and discussions on Commonwealth matters and bring an awareness of the Commonwealth to schools through projects such as an annual essay competition. A major school-related project sponsored by the Society and organized by the Ottawa branch is the annual Student Commonwealth Conference. It takes place in the national capital each year in the spring, and brings together Canadian high





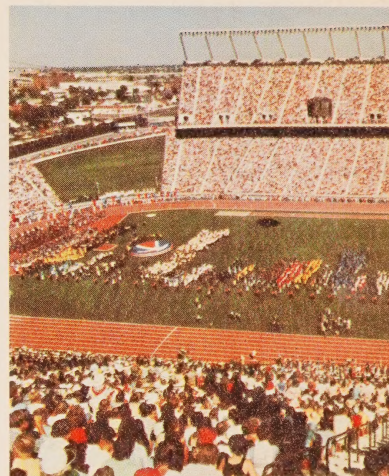




school students to represent each of the Commonwealth countries in a series of lectures, workshops and simulated negotiations and debates on a Commonwealth theme. The Conference concludes with a model Heads of Government Meeting at which the student delegates discuss agenda items of current concern to the Commonwealth.

In the realm of sport, the quadrennial Commonwealth Games and the associated Paraplegic Games provide an opportunity for athletes throughout the Commonwealth to meet in friendly competition. In 1978, the Queen opened the eleventh Commonwealth Games in Edmonton. From August 3 to 12, teams of athletes from more than 50 member countries, associated states and dependencies competed in what is often and correctly termed the "Friendly Games". In sports as in politics, there are no Commonwealth superpowers since the basic principle of the association is equality of all members. The Games have twice previously been held in Canada, in Hamilton and Vancouver. The twelfth Commonwealth Games are scheduled to be held in Australia in 1982.

In Canada's view, the future belongs to the unofficial Commonwealth because it promotes the grass roots links between the peoples of member countries which are so important to the association.



### **E. Canada and the Future of the Commonwealth Association:**

The Commonwealth in many ways is a microcosm of the world at large, displaying the same diversity of peoples and conditions. It has achieved a unique degree of co-operation and sense of community, showing that peoples of different races, religions, governmental backgrounds and economic conditions can work together for the common good. The Commonwealth has proven that an association based on the principles of equality, mutual respect and friendship, containing neither superpower nor subordinate power, is not only possible in today's world but can flourish. As Arnold Smith stated in his report to Heads of Government in 1965:

"In the current situation, it is vital that the Commonwealth use its network of relationships, its ease of communication, its mutual confidence and respect built up over so many years of intimacy. These are distinctive Commonwealth characteristics: the things that give our community its special place in the emerging pattern of international relationships. Our member countries are as different as can be; but they are linked together by ties at every human level, from heads of government to competing sportsmen to young people on exchange visits. Our ties are strong. They are the reasons why, amid the gloomy forebodings of a rebirth of the old divisive political and economic nationalisms, the Commonwealth still gives grounds for hope".

Canada believes in and supports the constructive role that the Commonwealth plays in world affairs. The Commonwealth association also provides an opportunity to enrich and deepen our bilateral relations with member countries. Internationally, Canadian participation in the Commonwealth reinforces the thrust of Canadian foreign policy generally and provides Canada with the opportunity to reach its goals with the help and understanding of fellow members. For these reasons, membership in the association is an important aspect of Canada's international relations.







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